UCLA Faculty Association

News and opinion from Dan Mitchell since 2009

Thursday, January 8, 2026

Straws in the Wind - Part 216

From The Hill: *The Trump administration... reached an agreement to reevaluate thousands of National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant applications that were stalled or cut because of their perceived connection to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. The agreement between the administration, unions and Democratic state attorneys general resolves part of a lawsuit filed against the administration for canceling hundreds of millions of dollars in research funds. A federal judge in Boston previously ruled that the terminations were unlawful and forced the government to reinstate several of the grants. The Supreme Court later partially lifted the decision, ruling that legal battles over the terminated grants should be handled by the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, which specializes in monetary disputes with the government.*

[The] agreement resolved part of the battle. The NIH said it will use its standard process to review the stalled, frozen or denied applications, rather than the Trump administration directives terminating grants relating to LGBTQ issues, gender identity and DEI... The NIH will not be required to fund any specific application, only to consider them under normal procedure...

Full story at https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/5666876-trump-administration-nih-grants-agreement/.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:20 AM No comments:

Labels: diversity, health care, politics

State of the State due today

The Council of UC Faculty Associations

- Fight for the Future of Higher Education: Academic Freedom from the Classroom to the Clinic
- Our Concerns Over Revisions to APMs 15 and 16
- Fight for the Future of Higher Ed Town Hall
- Letter from AAUP to UC Objecting to Trellix
- Judge rules Trump demands of UCLA must be made public

Remaking the University

- Minneapolis Lessons for Higher Education - 1/31/2026
- Achieving Our University - 1/20/2026
- Liner Note 46. On Direct Faculty Control of Universities - 1/17/2026

Higher Ed. News & Commentary

- Chronicle of Higher Education
- Inside Higher Education
- Remaking the University
- Changing Universities
- California Professor

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- Council of UC Faculty Associations

Other Faculty Organizations

- American Association of University Professors
- California Faculty Association (NEA)
- UC-AFT

Topics

Governor Newsom is due to present his State of the State address today (as opposed to his budget presentation). Whether he will refer to issues in higher education or give hints concerning the budget remains to be seen.

News Release:

SACRAMENTO – Governor Gavin Newsom will deliver his State of the State address before a joint session of the California Legislature on Thursday, January 8, 2026.

WHERE: California State Capitol

WHEN: Morning of Thursday, January 8, 2026

LIVESTREAM: Governor's Twitter page, Governor's Facebook page, the Governor's YouTube page, and the Governor's Instagram page...

Full release at https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/12/30/governor-newsom-to-deliver-state-of-the-state-address-next-week/.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:05 AM No comments:

Labels: governor, legislature, politics

Wednesday, January 7, 2026

And yet more on Harvard's data manipulation affair

From time to time on this blog, we have noted developments in the ongoing case of Francesca Gino, a former tenured professor in the Harvard Business School who studied honesty but was accused of data manipulation.

Eventually, Harvard dismissed her and, not surprisingly, litigation ensued.

Now it turns out that wealthy investor Bill Ackman - who has his own gripes with Harvard - is financing Gino's legal defense. In a recent X (twitter) post, he has published a long essay (yes, you can have essay-length tweets on X if if you pay) which outlines Gino's case:

...This is an important story about @Harvard, academic institutions, due process, and someone whose life is at stake, so I thought to share the high-level facts in an effort for this story to be heard, perhaps someday eventually as widely as the accusations and the conviction have already been disseminated.

By way of background, I have long had an interest in behavioral science/economics. To that end, the Pershing Square Foundation made grants of approximately $40 million to Harvard University to enable it to recruit some of the best behavioral scientists/economists in the world to create a center of excellence (The Foundations of Human Behavior) for research into better understanding human behavior.

My interest in Harvard and behavioral economics made me particularly interested in a story that first publicly appeared in June of 2023 when a Harvard Business School professor named Francesca Gino whose research focused on "honesty and ethical behavior" was (ironically) accused of falsifying her research. In June 2023, she was put on administrative leave, stripped of her titles, and removed as head of the Unit of Negotiation, Organizations and Markets at HBS. Nearly two years later, after a lengthy investigation, in May 2025, Gino's tenure was revoked and she was fired...

When Francesca reached out to me in June of 2024 for help, I was sufficiently compelled to do so. We have been funding her legal and expert costs since that time, and we will provide

politics (2363) UC (2096) UC Regents (1888) health care (1425) State Budget (1276) governor (1125) UC budget crisis (970) diversity (962) UC-Berkeley (912) pension (662) pensions (593) admissions (543) athletics (539) tuition (533) CSU (411) transportation (395) UC-Davis (377) online education (339) UCOP (312) uc retirement (308) ucrp (301) traffic (300) audio (291) UC enrollment (282) new hotel-conference center (282) UC-San Diego (263) enrollment (259) community colleges (243) LAO (231) UC-Irvine (185) fund raising (168) UC-Santa Barbara (162) UC-San Francisco (160) UC-Santa Cruz (159) controller (149) faculty center (144) UC-Riverside (142) ballot propositions (132) CalPERS (122) UC-Merced (117) faculty pay (109) Master Plan (106) Yudof (90) UCRS retirement (62) parking (61) Faculty Association at UCLA (60) privatization (59) CalSTRS (50) UC Berkeley (35) copyright (35) campus climate survey (28) UCRS (22) Michigan Model (18) UC Merced (17) uc funding (16) Regents (15) State Contribution (14) UCOF (14) faculty recruitment (12) UC pay (7) graduate education (6) UC San Diego (5) UC Irvine (3) UCpolitics (3) teaching evaluation (3) UC Santa Cruz (2)

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Lane Squeeze Coming Next Weekend

Straws in the Wind - Part 239

Watch the Regents Meetings of Jan. 21, 2026

Just the (Corrected) Facts - Part 2

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Climate Proposal

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Inquiring Minds

Straws in the Wind - Part 237

Encampment Case Goes Forward - Decision

Watch the Regents Meetings of January 20, 2026

Straws in the Wind - Part 236 (Compact 2.0)

Former UCLA Law Dean Named Head of Columbia

whatever resources she needs to clear her name...

Full tweet at https://x.com/BillAckman/status/2006958483220955275.

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Note: For our previous coverage of the Gino affair, type "Gino" into the search engine for this blog.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:30 AM No comments:

Labels: Harvard

Straws in the Wind - Part 215

From AP: *...For institutions like Duke that operate both a University and a Health System, the lapses in federal funding cut key revenue streams. In response, Duke enacted a $364 million cost-cutting program, becoming one of the first universities to trim its personnel pool amid the federal funding changes and one of the institutions with the largest budgetary cuts. The program has produced $229 million in savings across Duke's departments and schools for the fiscal year 2026 budget, according to a September Academic Council presentation by Executive Vice President Daniel Ennis and Rachel Satterfield, vice president for finance and treasurer. The goal, though, is to reduce its expense base by $350 million by 2030, which Duke aims to accomplish by saving an additional $47 million in each of the next two years, another $30 million in fiscal year 2029 and $11 million the year after. That leaves Duke with $364 million saved — $14 million above its initial target...*

In the face of uncertainty, Duke has prepared for the worst, as the move on [overhead] rates alone would cost it an estimated $194 million per year in lost funding. As part of this effort, in March, Duke President Vincent Price announced that the University would embark on a cost-reduction program, which began with a hiring freeze, a review of administrative efficiency and reducing non-personnel expenses...

In mid-April, University administrators said in a webinar that "employment action" would be "inescapable." Two weeks later, the University announced a voluntary separation incentive program (VSIP) — buyouts for eligible staff. Ultimately, it extended offers to 939 staff members, of which 599 accepted, constituting 5% of Duke's full-time staff.

...From the beginning, Duke made clear that if too few staff members accepted voluntary severance packages, non-voluntary layoffs would follow. In June, Price warned that would "likely" be the case. The layoffs largely took place in mid-August as students were making their way to campus and amounted to 45 employees being laid off by September...Even faculty members were affected by the cuts. In June, Price announced a retirement incentive program for eligible faculty members, which 82 of 273 faculty took. In Duke's School of Medicine, which was particularly affected by NIH award cuts, tenured faculty members who were underperforming could come to face salary cuts per a summer proposal.

...When students and faculty returned to campus in mid-August, things were different. Trinity first-years arriving on campus were greeted not by the typical team of more than 300 volunteer advisers — many of whom had taken the voluntary buyouts — but by a new team of 11 full-time advisers. Faculty who had worked with subject librarians in past years were surprised by the newfound absence of their colleagues, which they say was done without consultation...

Full story at https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-donald-trump-es-colleges-and-universities-stephen-miller-education-funding-f7bfa57ad08fdae98935064edb46437d#.

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New Anderson Dean
No Retroactive Pension Payments for Delayed Filings

From the Chronicle of Higher Education: *Rodney D. Bennett, chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, on Monday announced his abrupt resignation — effective next week — after a year of turmoil at the flagship campus. Bennett, who had served as chancellor at Nebraska since 2023, oversaw budget-driven cuts to academic programs this fall that were deeply unpopular with professors and led to a vote of no confidence in November from the Faculty Senate — the first in the university's history.*

Bennett, a former longtime president of the University of Southern Mississippi and the first Black person to lead the Lincoln campus, had been tasked in early 2025 by the Board of Regents to make cuts to close a $48-million budget deficit. Bennett's administration drew the ire of faculty members this past fall when campus leaders proposed making up part of that deficit by closing six academic programs through a process that professors felt was rushed, lacked significant faculty involvement, and used questionable metrics.

...Katherine Ankerson, a former executive vice chancellor who retired in 2024, will return as interim chancellor. She will be the first woman to lead the university.

...In a number of recent cases, college presidents have departed immediately after making major cuts, often amid campus blowback. Faculty no-confidence votes — like the one aimed at Bennett — are symbolic and often ignored by university administrations. But such rebukes can sour relationships between leaders and one of their largest constituencies, and they can contribute to presidential exits...

Full story at https://www.chronicle.com/article/u-of-nebraskas-big-cuts-drew-faculty-blowback-now-the-chancellor-is-leaving-suddenly.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:20 AM No comments:

Labels: Duke, politics, U of Nebraska

Will Harvard Continue to Lead the Charge? - Part 109

From the Harvard Crimson: *Gregory K. Davis was removed from his post as Dunster House resident dean effective immediately, according to a message circulated to House affiliates Monday morning... Davis wrote that he has been removed from the role and that, to his knowledge, no interim resident had been appointed... In a separate email about two hours later to House affiliates, Dunster Faculty Dean Taeku Lee announced that Emilie Raymer — who served as interim dean this fall when Davis was on parental leave — would continue in the role. But Lee did not address the circumstances around Davis' removal or specify how long Raymer would remain in the role of interim dean.*

...Davis was appointed to the role in 2024 and came under intense scrutiny in October 2025 after Yard Report — a right-wing aggregator that launched publicly in September — resurfaced years-old social media posts in which he appeared to condone violence and looting at protests and sharply criticized law enforcement and President Donald Trump. In a 2020 thread on X, Davis wrote that he would not fault individuals who wished harm upon Trump and attached a meme that stated, "If he dies, he dies." The article also included posts from the same year in which Davis characterized "rioting and looting" as part of a democratic process and called police officers "racist and evil."

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► 2024 (832)

...Following the online backlash, Davis expressed regret for the impact of the posts and emphasized respect for campus colleagues, including members of the Harvard University Police Department, in an October message circulated to House affiliates. Dunster House Faculty Deans Taeku Lee and Shirley Lee reaffirmed their support for students, writing that Dunster "is a community that welcomes all members." At the time, Davis wrote that he looked forward to returning to the House in January...

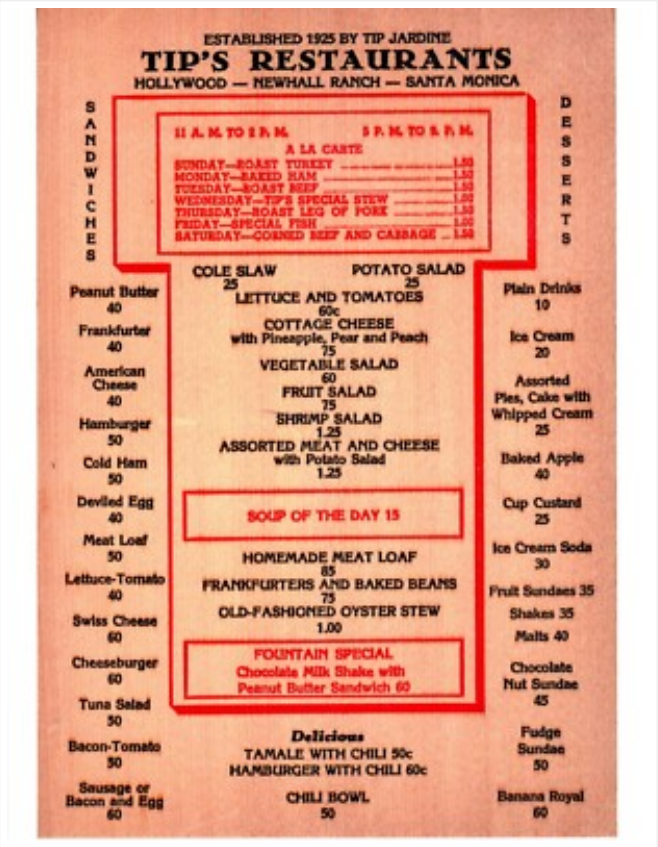
Full story at https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2026/1/5/gregory-davis-removed/.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:10 AM No comments:

Labels: Harvard, politics

Tuesday, January 6, 2026

Grade Inflation Is Not the Same as Price Inflation: Get Rid of the Cap



When you look at prices from back in the day - as in the menu above from the 1950s - everything looks incredibly cheap. Hamburgers are 50 cents, soup is 15 cents, etc. Of course, in the mid-1950s, average hourly wages for manufacturing production workers were about $1.80, and in those days, manufacturing workers were comparatively well paid.

Given inflation since then, you wouldn't be able to get a bowl of soup at a restaurant for anywhere near 15 cents. But note that the menu above - despite its strange appearance today - has relative prices, i.e., a hamburger costs more than soup, but less than the $1.25 shrimp salad.

Yours truly happened to come upon a recent article in the Daily Princetonian concerning a computer glitch at Princeton that for a short time accidentally made public a list of students who earned A+ in courses and those who failed. Normally, these are (private) reports that are required by the campus authorities:

"*When an undergraduate student earns an A-plus or failing grade, the course instructor must submit a report with a written justification for the grade to be reviewed by [the Office of the Deans of the College]. Each report includes the student's ID, course, term, and instructor.*"*

It's easy to understand why the authorities would want to be alerted to failures. But apparently there is concern about too many A+ grades. The problem is that holding the line at A+ is a Last Stand. (And we all know what happened to Custer!) There is no grade above A+.

► 2023 (828)
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► 2020 (914)
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► 2013 (776)
► 2012 (839)
► 2011 (738)
► 2010 (431)
► 2009 (12)

Contributors

- California Policy Issues
- Toby Higbie
- UCLA Faculty Association

With price inflation, in contrast, there is always a possible higher nominal price. A hamburger could be 50 cents or, over time, $5.00, or ... (Google tells me a Big Mac will nowadays cost you well over $5.00 and maybe over $6.00, depending on where you bought it.) There is no cap on prices, no equivalent to A+.

If the Princeton deans succeed at holding the line and in making an A+ hard to get, grade inflation means eventually everyone gets an A. If they don't succeed, eventually everyone gets an A+. There is no meaning of grading in either of those cases because there are no relative grades. No one officially has accomplished more or less than anyone else. Unlike price inflation, there is no more and no less. (Google tells me you can nowadays get a small order of French fries at McDonald's for around $2, i.e., fries cost less than a Big Mac so there is a more and a less in pricing.)

A Modest Proposal

The current grading system is capped at A (or A+) since there are no letters in the alphabet before A. Numerical grades, like prices, would be unlimited but could still preserve relativity. You can't runout of numbers. But starting from F and running backwards - omitting E - we have run out of letters.

Note that we already convert letter grades into numbers (A = 4, B = 3, etc.) when we compute grade point averages. So why not abandon the letters entirely and just keep the numbers? As grade inflation proceeds, students could get a grade of 5 or a 6 or a 7. But a 7 student would presumably have accomplished more than a 6 student. Eventually, as grade inflation continued, the 7 student would become an 8 and the 6 would become a 7. Later, the 7 would become an 8 and the 8 would become a 9, etc.

Note that numerical grading would also allow comparisons over time. Knowing the average grade in 2026 would allow conversion of 2026 grades to 2036 levels, when we get to 2036 and need to look back at someone's transcript. Essentially, you would have a grade index to make the adjustment just as we have, say, the Consumer Price Index to adjust past prices to contemporary levels.

Get rid of the cap!

Some say grade inflation is inevitable for various reasons including use of student ratings of instructors. But no one has a good remedy. We just lament the phenomenon. Until there is a remedy, why not get rid of the cap?

===

*https://www.dailyprprincetonian.com/article/2025/12/princeton-news-adpol-a-plus-failing-grades-academic-early-alerts-exposed-odoc-website.

Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:35 AM No comments:

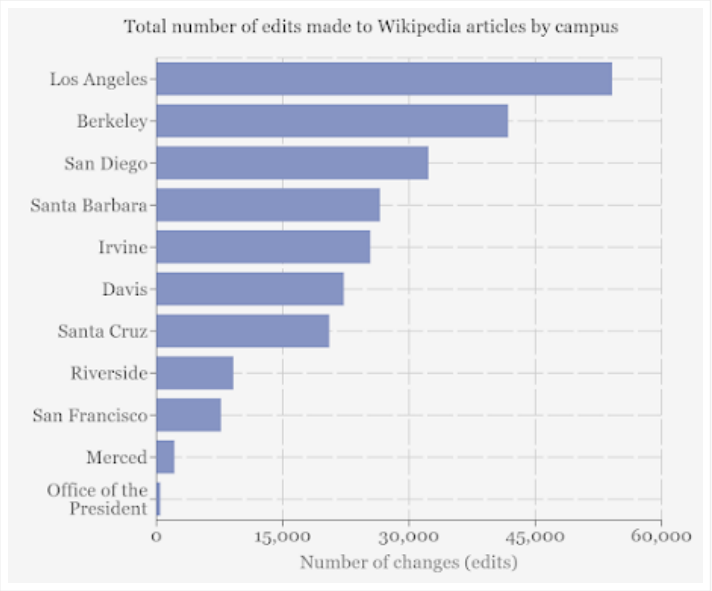
Labels: Princeton U

UCLA ahead in the Wikipedia editing sweepstakes

The Daily Cal calculated the total number of Wikipedia edits - additions and deletions - by

campus IP addresses across the UC system. It turns out that since its inception to late 2025, UCLA addresses made over 54,000 edits.

It's not clear whether that's a Good Thing, a Bad Thing, or just a Thing. Below is a chart from the article which can be found at https://data.dailycal.org/2025-12-24-wikiedits.



Posted by California Policy Issues at 3:30 AM No comments:

Labels: UC, UC-Berkeley, UC-Davis, UC-Irvine, UC-Merced, UC-Riverside, UC-San Diego, UC-San Francisco, UC-Santa Barbara, UC-Santa Cruz, UCLA, UCOP

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